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**AALBORG UNIVERSITY**  
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## **Introduction for PhD Supervisors - a practical guide to prepare you for collaboration with PhD students.**

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# **INTRODUCTION FOR PHD SUPERVISORS**

**- A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO PREPARE  
YOU FOR COLLABORATION WITH  
PHD STUDENTS**



**THE DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE  
FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE  
AALBORG UNIVERSITY**

# VISION AND STRATEGY AS A SUPERVISOR

**THIS BOOKLET IS AN INTRODUCTION FOR PHD SUPERVISORS AT THE FACULTY OF ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE AT AALBORG UNIVERSITY. IT AIMS TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THE MOST COMMON ISSUES AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHEN SUPERVISING PHD STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENTS. THE INTENTION IS ALSO TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A SET OF STRATEGIES AND TOOLS TO FACILITATE SUCCESSFUL COLLABORATION WITH YOUR PHD STUDENT.**

## RECRUITMENT, GOALS AND PRACTICES OF PHD SUPERVISION

Supervisors at the Faculty of Engineering and Science use different recruitment strategies in order to select suitable candidates for a PhD position. Some supervisors select suitable candidates from the ranks of master's students; some hear about them through their professional networks; some advertise and interview potential candidates and some hire people as research assistants prior to a position as PhD student. Whatever the strategy, supervisors are increasingly aware that proper recruitment takes time and is worth the investment (Bøgelund 2014). It can often be a rather challenging task to find a person that fits into the job, the field and the research environment, and no generic list of skills criteria exists in the literature. What is considered a significant talent in one environment can be unrecognized in another. The best advice currently from the field of talent management is to discuss skills criteria amongst those in the research environment so that implicit knowledge can be articulated in the group, aligned and utilized in that specific field (Christensen M 2012).

Another important step is getting clear about your own goals and strategies as a PhD supervisor. In general, PhD supervision varies with the individual supervisor, the professional goals and practices of

the field and the specific PhD project. Goals and strategy may even vary during the process. What makes up your vision and strategy as PhD supervisor is for you to select within these frameworks. The following three knowledge production perspectives (Table below), deduced from an interview study with twelve supervisors at the faculty, can offer some clarity and inspiration (Bøgelund and Kolmos 2013). Different norms and obligations are reflected in these perspectives, and they can be combined in many ways. Supervisors may of course be inspired by all three perspectives at the same time.

At the next page the three perspectives on knowledge production is illustrated in three quotations.

## EXPECTATIONS IN SUPERVISION

At a general level, the fundamental question for you as PhD supervisor could be framed as 'What are my roles and obligations towards the university, the PhD student, others and myself as supervisor'? At a more practical level, a brief list of questions is provided for you to facilitate reflection on the expectations you may have as PhD supervisor.

| <b>KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION</b>   | <b>AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE</b>  | <b>A MARKET PERSPECTIVE</b>  | <b>A CHANGING SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE</b>   |
|-------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>GOAL OF SUPERVISION</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Academic contribution</li><li>• A passionate professional</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Production of articles, PhDs and patents</li><li>• Collaboration with industry</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Global outreach</li><li>• Educating academics to act as change agents</li></ul> |
| <b>PRACTICE AS SUPERVISOR</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional sparring partner</li></ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Project leader</li></ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All round facilitator</li></ul>   |



Relevant questions for you to consider:

1. To what extent is it my responsibility as supervisor to select a research topic? Should I decide on which theoretical framework or methodology is most appropriate?
2. Is a warm supportive relationship between me and the PhD student important for successful doctorate? Or what should be the character of our relationship?
3. Is the most important task as supervisor to ensure the quality of the research product(s) of the PhD student? Why/Why not?
4. Research projects may entail activities that go beyond normal working hours. Should the PhD student accept this without further notice? Do I play a role in time management?
5. Do I believe the PhD student is expected to work independently and with a lot of initiative from the start? Or is it part of my task as supervisor to teach the PhD student how to be an independent researcher?
6. Should I insist on regular meetings with the PhD student and regularly check that the PhD student is working consistently and on task?
7. Do academic agendas take priority over managerial or industrial agendas in the research project of the PhD student?
8. Should I assist in the writing of the thesis if necessary? Why/Why not?

Questions inspired by [www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/)

#### **AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE:**

**"I REALLY ENJOY THE PHD PROCESS AND THE ENVIRONMENT AROUND IT VERY MUCH. I THINK IT IS EXCITING TO WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO GO THROUGH THAT KIND OF DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS. ... ESPECIALLY THE THING ABOUT BUILDING UP A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE I REALLY ENJOY. ... WATCHING SOMEONE GROW INTO AN ACADEMIC."**

SUPERVISOR 1

#### **A MARKET DRIVEN PERSPECTIVE:**

**"PEOPLE IN INDUSTRY DO NOT TYPICALLY HAVE THE TIME TO GO INTO DEPTH WITH ANYTHING ... THEN IT'S NICE TO HAVE THESE PHD STUDENTS...THEY ARE SKILLED RESOURCES ... IT IS ALSO A GOOD INVESTMENT THAT I SPEND SOME OF MY TIME ON A YOUNG, CLEVER PERSON, AND GET HIM/HER TO DO WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE MYSELF."**

SUPERVISOR 2

#### **A CHANGING SOCIETY PERSPECTIVE:**

**"I ALSO THINK WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO THE OTHER COUNTRIES... THE GOAL IS NOT ONLY TO MAKE RESEARCHERS, IT IS ALSO TO DEVELOP PEOPLE WHO CAN BE INNOVATIVE IN THEIR OWN SYSTEMS ... IT IS A CULTURAL REVOLUTION WE TAKE PART IN WHEN WE E.G. FACILITATE IN A MORE DEMOCRATIC WAY AND WITH A MORE UNPREJUDICED APPROACH."**

SUPERVISOR 3

# PHASES OF SUPERVISION

## THE FIRST HALF YEAR

The first half year is a critical period of time for the PhD student. This is the time where they have to settle in and get used to new working habits and a new working environment. It will take some extra energy and effort, especially for international students. International PhD students may experience culture shock during the first few months of their stay (Dimitrov 2009). Culture shock is a psychological response to living in a new environment in which everything is unfamiliar, from food to rules of social interaction to the way one engages in the professional activities of writing and discussing. Symptoms may vary, but some of them can be fatigue, homesickness, loneliness, lack of interest in trying new things, inability to work efficiently, and irritability. It tends to be worst around three months after arrival, and again six months after arrival. Irrespective of nationality, a good start for a PhD student will prove valuable to both student and supervisor. As a supervisor, you can support a smooth transition by a variety of means. Being explicit about goals, working habits and collaborative expectations is one of them. Metacognition in general about ways to behave regarding both study and social interaction will reduce confusion and thus reduce energy spent on 'figuring things out' on the part of the PhD student. Alignment of expectations and being curious about what occupies the attention of the student will prove equally beneficial. Involving the rest of the research group in the integration of the new research group member could also be of great value. Potentially, this will reduce your workload, connect people in a better way and make the PhD student feel a part of the community.

### COLLABORATIVE SCAFFOLDING EFFORTS:

**"AS A SUPERVISOR, I GET THE PHD STUDENTS TO BE SELF-RELIANT AND HELP EACH OTHER. THEY ARE PLACED IN THE SAME OFFICES AND THERE IS A MENTORING SCHEME. WE MAKE THEM DO PAPERS TOGETHER WITH SOME OF THE OTHER RESEARCHERS, WHICH I'VE HAD REALLY GOOD EXPERIENCES WITH. THERE IS A GROUP MEETING EACH WEDNESDAY THAT EVERYONE IS EXPECTED TO ATTEND AND I ENCOURAGE THEM TO SEEK AID AND ASSISTANCE FROM OTHERS."**

SUPERVISOR 4

## FACILITATING AN INDEPENDENT PHD

The transition to independent scholar is part and parcel of the doctoral education process. The PhD degree requires the independent scholar to become a 'creator of knowledge' through original research, rather than a 'consumer of knowledge' (Gardner 2008). In order to become a creator of knowledge the PhD student needs to find their passion and identity as a scholar among other scholars and acquire the necessary academic skills characteristic of their field.

A model for the transition from student to independent researcher often referred to in the literature is the 'staircase to legitimacy' (Handal og Lauvås 2006). Through 4 stages, the PhD student transforms from an 'irresolute amateur', goes through the phases of the 'ignorant besserwisser' and the 'inner crisis' to the phase of 'being legitimate'. The point of the model is that the supervisor has to adapt his or her role to support the transitions. In the first phase, the supervisor needs to strike a balance between taking over too much and leaving too much to the student. In the second phase, the balancing is more a question of juggling between encouragement and setting limits, whereas the third phase is crucial in terms of supporting the capability and confidence of the emerging researcher. The supervisor role in the fourth phase is that of scrutinizing the work done by the emerging researcher. There will of course be individual variations; the point is that the role of the PhD supervisor changes during the process. The model points out the importance of striking a balance between too much and too little support in the beginning. It also underscores the crucial need for being serious, curious and constructive up front in the third phase, when and if the PhD student starts to question their own legitimacy or even identity as a scholar.

### FACILITATING AN INDEPENDENT PHD STUDENT:

**"INITIALLY MY SUPERVISOR WAS HELPING ME TO TAKE THE DECISIONS AND MOST OF THE TIME HE WOULD GIVE ME INPUT... THEN LATER ON WHEN I SETTLED DOWN, I FIGURED OUT WHAT WAS GOOD FOR ME, AND NOW IT IS A SELF-DOING PROCESS. HIS ROLE IS NOW TO COMMENT ON MY WORK, NOT TO GUIDE MY WORK. IT WAS A GOOD PROCESS ... IT GAVE ME SOME CONFIDENCE"**

INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENT 1





Especially when it comes to international PhD students, careful facilitation is of great value (Goode 2007, Leathwood 2006, Ryan and Viète 2009). Ultimately, the actions of the supervisor depend of course on the needs of the specific individual, irrespective of nationality.

### METACOGNITION AND ALIGNMENT OF EXPECTATIONS

On the practical level, the facilitating approach of the supervisor revolves around the skills pointed out in the following, their extent being dictated by needs of the specific PhD student (Bøgelund 2013):

- Being able to adapt leadership and structure in the beginning
- Pairing with older PhDs and introducing to network
- Being communicative on a meta level and asking for reflection
- Mirroring what the PhD says and asking additional questions
- Giving constructive feedback
- Letting the responsibility increasingly lie with the PhD student; looking out for capability issues

Being able to communicate on a meta level and taking care to align expectations on the basis of dialogue is of particular importance (3rd skill). In the column to the right are examples of meta-level questions related to the learning experience of international PhD students, as well as further resources to support the initial and ongoing alignment of expectations with PhD students in general. The issues of mirroring and constructive feedback are discussed later on in this brochure.

### EXAMPLES OF META-LEVEL QUESTIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENTS – THE ISSUE OF STUDY EXPERIENCE

1. What do you find surprising, refreshing or hard about the new mode of learning?
2. What do you notice others doing? And what do you think about that?
3. What do you enjoy doing and what do you find frustrating?
4. What kinds of dilemmas or insecurities do new habits give rise to?
5. How have you tried to deal with new issues, and what problems did you run into?
6. What kind of skills would you need to develop to cope with the new situation?
7. What kind of help could you possibly need?

### WEB RESOURCES

#### Karolinska Institutet – Sweden:

- An instrument to align initial expectations: ([www.internwebben.ki.se/sites/default/files/successful\\_supervision\\_-\\_a\\_dialogue\\_facilitator.pdf](http://www.internwebben.ki.se/sites/default/files/successful_supervision_-_a_dialogue_facilitator.pdf))

#### The research supervision website at the University of Oxford:

- General supervision resources: [www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/supervision/)
- Assessment of progress towards goals and skills – an instrument for ongoing discussion and alignment: ([www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminox.ac.uk/local/sites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/overview/rsv/StudentProfileProforma.pdf](http://www.learning.ox.ac.uk/media/global/wwwadminox.ac.uk/local/sites/oxfordlearninginstitute/documents/overview/rsv/StudentProfileProforma.pdf))

### ALIGNMENT OF EXPECTATIONS:

**"THE DANES KNOW THE CULTURE AND HAVE BEEN EDUCATED IN A DANISH SYSTEM. THAT IS WHY IT IS NOT AS DIFFICULT FOR THEM – THE ALIGNMENT OF EXPECTATIONS IS MUCH EASIER. WITH INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IT TAKES A BIGGER EFFORT; YOU HAVE TO BE MUCH MORE EXPLICIT AS SUPERVISOR."**

SUPERVISOR 5

# INTERCULTURAL ISSUES

When people get together across cultures, there is room for misinterpretation and genuine misunderstanding. To heighten awareness of cultural differences, you may benefit from the following review of the most common cultural variations, based on the booklet *"Mentoring Graduate Students across Cultures"* (Dimitrov 2009). A more detailed introduction can be found in that booklet.

## POWER AND STATUS - HEIGHTENED NEED FOR SAVING FACE

Some cultures put much emphasis on showing respect and recognition towards older people or people who are higher ranking, whereas other cultures do not. In general we talk about high or low power distance cultures. High power distance cultures have more visible and formal hierarchy structures, whereas low power distance cultures such as that of Denmark emphasize informality and equality of people. This has implications for the way people relate to each other. In high power distance cultures, deference to authority keeps students from openly discussing and arguing with professors; they would be more inclined to comply with whatever the supervisor says. In a low power distance culture like that of Denmark, compliance of this sort seriously affects the learning of the PhD student, especially when it comes to being reflective and critical. Many international PhD students that come from higher power distance cultures do encounter problems with being reflective and critical, since this kind of learning approach is not encouraged in their home countries.

A good way to deal with this as supervisor is to 'give permission' to disagree and argue openly both explicitly and implicitly. Giving permission implicitly means inviting their opinion without revealing your own opinion, recognizing and acknowledging their attempts to make up their own mind, speaking positively about others who do that, even though you disagree with their opinion etc. It probably has to be done more than once, and both with respect to reading and reflecting upon literature in the field, and with respect to the dialogue between the two of you. Exposing the PhD student to the way things are done here in Denmark will also make a big difference. If you are a supervisor from a higher power distance culture and you supervise a Danish student, you may equally want to explain, for instance, that you would like him or her to check in with you on a regular basis before they begin new initiatives.

### **DON'T TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED – BE CRITICAL, BE REFLECTIVE**

**"THEN I GOT TO WORK WITH MY SUPERVISOR. HE  
WANTS TO OPEN UP THINGS. IT WAS SO SHOCKING  
AND STRESSFUL TO WORK WITH HIM. MENTALLY  
I COULDN'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HE WAS TRYING  
TO TELL ME. HE WAS FRUSTRATED WITH ME,  
BECAUSE I DIDN'T GET IT. THEN MY BOYFRIEND  
TOLD ME TO ASK HIM IN THE END OF THE MEETING  
– WAS IT THIS YOU MEANT? THEN HE WOULD SAY:  
NO! OUT OF THAT I FINALLY GOT THE POINT –  
DON'T TAKE THINGS FOR GRANTED, BE CRITICAL,  
BE REFLECTIVE."**

INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENT 2

In some cultures, students will go to great lengths to protect the honor and reputation of their supervisors, meaning, for instance, that they will struggle with things on their own rather than risk putting you as supervisor in a situation where you would have to say that you didn't know how to solve the problem. Again, a good way to deal with this is to be explicit about your expectations. You may want to use an inoculation, meaning that you address the issue in advance, pointing out that you are aware of, for instance, the respect and shyness that usually keeps students from asking questions, but you would welcome them anyway, even if you are not able to give a specific answer. Taking the time to align expectations and address issues beforehand in the first phase will often benefit the opportunities for co-operation and learning even later on.

## COMMUNICATION STYLES: DIRECTNESS AND INDIRECTNESS

Another area that is known to cause misunderstandings is the way of communication. The Danish way of communication is very direct to the extent that the speaker or the writer is expected to make sure that the message is clear and understood. The listener or the reader should not have to guess or imply from the context what is being said or written.

This has consequences both in terms of speaking with people and writing academic papers. When local people speak up, they will tend to be very open, and to the point early on in the conversation, they will usually not walk around the subject or give small hints. In this sense Danish culture is a low context culture. Indirect or tacit communication via body language or vague allusion will not necessarily be understood. If your PhD student comes from a higher context culture, where the responsibility to understand the intended meaning rests with the listener or reader, implying that he or she is used to picking up on the context of what is being said, they may find it challenging both to cope with the directness and to get a clear and understandable message across to others. As a supervisor, you may need to pay attention to body language or the slight pause before they comply with a task. In terms of writing, your PhD student may also need some guidance in getting to the point more quickly, and in being clear and explicit about their arguments. Here you will probably need to be very specific. Not 'the paper is vague', but 'you state your thesis at the end, it will help the reader, if you start with it.'

#### **ABOUT RESPECTABLE BARRIERS, DIRECTNESS AND TAKING INITIATIVE:**

**"THE DANISH STUDENTS – THEY ARE QUITE CONFIDENT AND DIRECT. THEY CAN DISCUSS WITH THEIR SUPERVISORS. THEY DO NOT WORRY ABOUT WHAT THEIR SUPERVISORS THINK. WE ARE NOT USED TO THAT KIND OF RELATIONSHIP WITH A SUPERVISOR. IN MY COUNTRY IT IS VERY BAD TO SAY 'I WANT IT THIS OR THAT WAY'. WE LISTEN TO OUR SUPERVISOR. IN THAT WAY WE ARE NOT VERY FRANK WITH OUR SUPERVISOR. WE THINK THAT OUR SUPERVISOR NEEDS TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE, AND I AM MORE CONCERNED WITH HOW HE REACTS, IF I WILL BREAK SOME RESPECTABLE BARRIER."**

INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENT 3

#### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN RULE FOLLOWING, CONFLICT STYLES, AND TIME MANAGEMENT**

The prevailing assumption in Danish culture is that rules and instructions are reasonable and should be followed, and apply equally to everyone. The perception of rules by international PhD students may differ from this. In some countries you need to look upon rules more like guidelines to be followed when necessary, but ignored when possible, if you want to survive or have a reasonable life. Another variation of not seeing the usefulness of adhering to rules is the inherent expectation that while rules apply to

everyone in principle, individual consideration and contextual factors may alter that. As a supervisor, you may help your international PhD student navigate institutional policies by being explicit about which rules are set in stone and which are not. It may also help to explain the possible consequences of not following rules.

Unless the expectations for resolving disagreements are clear, cultural differences in the way we resolve disagreements could adversely affect the collaboration. In terms of conflict, some cultures are more 'affective' and some cultures are more 'neutral'. In affective cultures it is more common to express being upset at work, whereas it is less common in a neutral culture. Denmark is a neutral culture in this sense, meaning that the more calmly and rationally you attend to disagreements, the more positively you are regarded. Furthermore, those involved in a conflict generally prefer to disentangle it themselves without the interference of others. Expressing strong emotions at work or asking outsiders to engage in a conflict is generally not appreciated. This collides with the tradition of more affective cultures where expression of emotions is not only acceptable but is even seen as a sign of being authentic, passionate and committed to finding a resolution. Calling upon others to mediate is also a common feature of more affective cultures. As always, being aware of these differences, aligning expectations and encouraging your PhD student to address you, is a basic approach to managing differences in conflict style.

A final issue under the heading of intercultural issues is perception of time management. In 'polychronic' cultures schedules are more flexible, relationship issues take priority over being punctual and plans are more easily changed and adapted than in 'monochronic' cultures. Monochronic cultures like that of Denmark are more task-oriented, schedules are seen as important and worth sticking to, and there is an emphasis on promptness. If you value punctuality and effectiveness, and your PhD student seems to drop by to say hello and hang around for a chat in order to develop a good relationship, you may need to communicate your expectations and preferences in terms of time management and socializing.

#### **WEB RESOURCES RELATED TO INTERCULTURAL SUPERVISION**

##### **Karolinska Institutet – Sweden:**

- An ethical policy for cross-cultural supervision: ([http://internwebben.ki.se/sites/default/files/ethcial\\_policy\\_for\\_supervision.pdf](http://internwebben.ki.se/sites/default/files/ethcial_policy_for_supervision.pdf))

•

##### **Angel Production in conjunction with Birkbeck, University of London:**

- The UK Doctorate Video – a homepage with videos on issues related to coming to Britain for a PhD: [www.angelproductions.co.uk/UKDoctorate.htm](http://www.angelproductions.co.uk/UKDoctorate.htm)



# DIALOGUE, FEEDBACK AND MOTIVATION

Dialogue and discussion about written work will often be at the center of your collaboration with your PhD students. Being able to engage in constructive and motivating communication is more often than not of vital importance for a good and successful PhD process. As a supervisor, dialogue and feedback are your tools for professional communication and for motivating the PhD student.

## FEEDBACK MODES IN A DIALOGUE

Human beings are naturally wired for connection. This means we depend on each other during a dialogue, and what you get back when you invest in communication with another is important. Some responses will encourage and enlighten you; others will not. Speaking up can be considered an investment in another human being, and as a person you normally like to get back the energy you invested. Ideally, when you or your PhD student speaks up, you can get 5 kinds of feedback. When you send out a message, your partner in dialogue may (Tverskov et al. 2000, Hoffmeyer 2008):

1. Contain and understand your message – ‘Oh, so you think “x” about “y”. How come?’
2. Convey his or her thoughts concerning your message – ‘I think about “z”, when you say that...’
3. Express how he or she feels about your message – ‘I enjoy/dislike your thoughts/emotions/situation...’
4. Say what he or she is otherwise preoccupied with – ‘well, I am more interested in...’
5. Not say anything – returning silence

The PhD student will probably most appreciate feedback along the lines of mode 1, 2 or 3 and sometimes 4, but never 5. Mode 1, 2 and 3 are generally motivating feedback modes because they concentrate on the message and perspective of the PhD student. In a professional setting like the university mode 2 and 4 often prevail, while mode 1 and especially mode 3 about feelings are less used. Mode 5 is often considered unpleasant or even hostile by the receiver. Waiting too long

to receive an answer by email for instance, may cause irritation or the like, unless you have a clear agreement about it.

If your PhD student only gets feedback 2, 4 or even 5 from you as a supervisor, he or she will be at risk of demotivation. He or she may consider you as more of an evaluator, and less of a helper with an interest in their perspective as a PhD student. It will of course depend on the individual PhD student, but most PhD students starting out are struggling to understand the field and find their identity as researchers. They will most certainly welcome the interest and possibilities for learning that especially mode 1 feedback supports. Many students also appreciate and get motivated when you as a supervisor express your feelings about their work.

## DEMOTIVATING A PHD STUDENT

**“MY SUPERVISOR HAD VERY CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AS TO WHAT HE WANTED ME TO PRODUCE, BUT HOW I WAS GOING TO PRODUCE IT WAS MORE OF A QUESTION AND MY RESPONSIBILITY. HE IS NOT THE KIND OF PERSON TO LOOK TO WHEN YOU GET STUCK. HE IS EVALUATING YOU, HE IS NOT HELPING YOU. HE IS EXPECTING A CERTAIN KIND OF LEVEL, AND MOST OF THE STUDENTS HERE ARE STRUGGLING TO GET TO THAT LEVEL BY THEMSELVES. ”**

INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENT 3

## MOTIVATIONAL FEEDBACK – FOCUSING ON MODE 1

As already pointed out feedback mode 1, 2 and 3 are motivational feedback modes that enhance dialogue, connection and learning. The following table presents a sketch for how to do this, and we will go into detail with the first mode in the following, since this is so beneficial for learning and motivation.

| COMMUNICATIVE NEED OR WANT FROM PHD   | HOW TO ADDRESS IT   |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Understand me and my message       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Active listening – mirror, contain, invite</li><li>• Unfolding the dialogue by using questions</li></ul>              |
| 2. What is your view on this subject? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Your professional opinion/comment</li></ul>   |
| 3. How do you feel about my message?  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I like... I don't like – recognition and critique</li><li>• I feel happy for you... It makes me sad that...</li></ul> |

When your PhD student wants to, or can benefit from, being contained and understood, 'active listening' and unfolding the dialogue are the tools to use. Active listening means: "to help other people unfold and acquire new recognition" (Rogers and Farson 1957). When you listen actively, you leave your own perspective, and 'cross the bridge' to the other person, being interested in their perspective. It requires that you are able to be curious and contain whatever the other person says. You have to be able to "keep the other friendly inside", and tolerate what might be annoying or stressful (Christensen B 2012). You also need to be able to mirror the other person, either by your words or your body

language. When you repeat messages, it is a good idea to take care to use the key words of the other. In the box about active listening more specific do's and don'ts are provided for inspiration.

During a supervisory meeting, you may benefit from arranging the dialogue according to the questions outlined in the box about unfolding a dialogue where you go from the more specific to the more challenging and evaluative questions. At the end there are good rules of thumb on how to give text feedback based on recommendations from the literature.

#### ACTIVE LISTENING – HOW TO DO IT (BASED ON ROGERS AND FARSON 1957)

| DO NOT:                      | DO:                                  |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Judge or evaluate            | Focus on the other                   |
| State your own opinion       | Be curious                           |
| Give ideas or good advice;-) | Be empathetic - contain              |
| Talk about your self         | Let the other speak                  |
|                              | Repeat words and match body language |
|                              | Ask additional questions             |

| KIND OF QUESTION        | EXAMPLES  |
|-------------------------|---|
| Specific questions      | How far are you in your analysis?<br>Can you give me examples?                          |
| Investigative questions | How serious do you think the situation is?<br>What kinds of tasks do you find suitable? |
| Challenging questions   | What do you think will happen if you ...?<br>You say that... is that always the case?   |
| Evaluating questions    | How can you use this conversation?<br>What are your thoughts on the subject now?        |

#### GIVING TEXT FEEDBACK – RULES OF THUMB (WICHMANN-HANSEN 2012)

|  |
|--|
| Expect a cover letter and let the writer comment on the status of the text first – then match expectations for the meeting – what should the outcome be? |
| Give few and central comments rather than many – to avoid overkill   |
| Differentiate between global and local comments – don't get lost in details  |
| Give specific and informative feedback – both negative and positive!   |
| Give action instructions   |

# CONTACT AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

It is highly unlikely that you will not encounter disagreements of some kind over the course of a relationship that lasts for several years. Thus it is a good idea to address the issue of conflict management with your PhD students in advance and to gain some knowledge on how to deal with conflictual issues. To discuss when and how you should deal with conflicts is an issue for your mutual alignment of expectations in the start of the PhD project. You might find some inspiration on how to deal with conflicts in the following.

## BEING IN CONTACT – THE PREREQUISITE OF GOOD CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Being in contact with another person can be defined as a meeting between you and another about your inner worlds (Tverskov et al. 2000). It demands that both of you are able to focus inwards and outwards. Thus, you are in contact with yourself, the other is in contact with himself or herself, and there is communication between you and the other about what is inside.

A conflict arises when you do not want the same thing. Thus, a conflict is the recognition of limits that demand processing. It only takes one person to regard it as an important issue before it becomes an issue for both of you. If you are able to handle the difference, or even be inspired by it, change and development occur. In this respect, development and conflict are closely related, and conflict should be appreciated as a vehicle for learning and development.

## CONFLICTS, PROBLEMS AND THE ART OF NEGOTIATION

If you are not able to handle the disagreement or you suppress it, a conflict may turn into a problem either immediately or over time. At least if it concerns an important issue. Thus, problems are conflicts that

are not being processed. Conflicts can be either open or avoided. As the adjective describes, open conflicts bring the disagreement out into the open, whereas avoided conflicts concern issues that are suppressed. The latter occurs more frequently than the former, especially if the power between the two parties is unequally distributed (Hammerich og Frydensberg 2006), as is the case with a PhD supervisor and PhD students. Therefore, you occupy a more privileged position for raising conflictual issues and inviting disagreements to get them processed. Or as Pippi Longstocking puts it: 'If you are very strong, you also have to be very nice.' (Hammerich og Frydensberg 2006; pp. 18)

### A PHD STUDENT ON CONFLICTS

**"CONFLICTS? I HAVE NO CONFLICTS WITH MY MAIN SUPERVISOR, OR MY CO-SUPERVISOR. I AM A PHD STUDENT. I DO NOT HAVE CONFLICTS."**

INTERNATIONAL PHD STUDENT 4

To resolve a conflict means identifying the differences and negotiating them up to a satisfying point. The task can be filled with frustration, and you have to make room for that as well. Conflict management is a processual thing often involving feelings. At times it may seem as if no solution can be found, but then after a break or a time out things may look differently.

## DIFFERENT WAYS OF MANAGING A CONFLICT

Not all conflicts should be dealt with in the same way. Depending on the situation three ways of approaching a conflict are ideal: Defense mode, let go mode or go into mode (Mourier et al. 2008). In the table you see what kinds of behavior and activities are called for in each case.

### WAYS OF APPROACHING A CONFLICT

|              |   |
|--------------|---|
| Defense mode | Create back up and support, use strategic skills and evaluate energy investment |
| Let go mode  | Find ways around the issue  |
| Go into mode | Make contact, negotiate on the premise of both being satisfied, accept outcome  |

Unless the conflict is about ending the relationship with your PhD student, defense mode is hardly what is called for. Let go mode may be wise if the conflict concerns issues of little relevance for the PhD project. Finding ways around the issue might also be appropriate, if you for some reason find it hard to deal with the conflict, or you assess that nothing good will come of it, and then prepare yourself to live with the consequences. If it is an important issue, and you decide to go for it, 'go into' mode is the proper approach.

### GOING INTO THE CONFLICT

The basic premise of conflict management is that both parties have agreed to discuss the issue. They also have to agree on 1) talking about one thing at a time, 2) talking about the same thing, and 3) talking about one person's view at a time (Hoffmeyer 2008). Therefore, this approach first and foremost calls for a lot of active listening, even if feedback mode 2 and 3 are also relevant.

It is a good idea to preframe the situation as you start. This means that you metacommunicate about the goals and rules of the conversation and

emphasize your good intentions. During the discussion you may need to buy some time, invite the other to come forward, or deal with the other being upset. The table on the next page contains examples of good remarks that can be useful in these situations. A good way to manage the discussion is also to keep an eye on whether or not there are internal conflicts that keep you from saying important things. For instance, if you really dislike a behavior of your PhD student, but are afraid to hurt the person, saying both things will do the trick. This is called providing 'the whole message' (Hoffmeyer 2008). You may also encourage your PhD student to do the same. The whole message approach improves the chances that everything important is brought out into the open, while still keeping your relationship intact. It also usually releases a lot of pent up emotions.

There are four ways to finish a discussion (Hoffmeyer 2008). Either you meet in 1) agreement, or 2) in being different with a need to experiment further, or 3) in the need to part from each other or 4) exhaustion. Number four is highly unlikely in a professional setting where you have more status than the PhD student. What you should take into consideration, however, is whether you really get the conflict resolved or not. A good idea is to make an agreement that you will return to the issue again to address what may remain.



## GOOD REMARKS IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS

### PREFRAMING THE SITUATION:

I need to discuss certain issues with you – at the same time I am afraid I will offend you – which is the last thing I want to do... So I really need your feedback in order to... and please let me know how you react to it...

To have a good discussion it is important that... we both contribute... we take a break at some point... we evaluate tomorrow...

### 'BUYING TIME' – IT IS A PROCESS:

I have to think about that...

I don't like the situation right now...

I need a break – I have to go to the toilet – let's take a time out

### 'THE WHOLE MESSAGE':

I need to say that I dislike your attitude in the group... It is also true that I don't like to say this because... and now I am relieved at having said it... Now I need your feedback...

### INVITING THE OTHER TO COME FORWARD:

Let me hear your view on this?

You are detaching from me now... what is happening?

Can you repeat what I said, so I can hear whether you got me right?

Are you still here with me? What are you thinking about?

Has something happened lately, you seem distracted and keep forgetting things?

### DEALING WITH THE OTHER WHEN HE OR SHE IS UPSET:

I get the impression that you are a bit upset right now, are you? I may also be affected. Let's take a break.

We agreed on discussing this... are you still willing?

We agreed on discussing X... Let's stick to that and deal with Y afterwards.

Do you agree that we both have to be listened to?

## MANAGING FEELINGS

Finally, a few words about how to deal with feelings if you or your PhD student becomes too affected during a discussion: **1)** First of all take a time out. **2)** Then embrace and recognize the feelings that arise. Take your time at this point and try not to think too much, but keep your focus on your body and try to loosen up via breathing, for instance. This calms a person down. Although emotions originate in the brain, we first experience them in our body. They make themselves known through energy, sensations, and bodily reactions; we feel them. The more lost we get in our thoughts, the further we are from connecting with our emotions. The more we sense our feelings in our body, the more we calm down. Embracing our feelings and containing them in our bodies will take us away from acting out our emotions. Yelling, running out of the room or scolding someone will usually not benefit our aims or our relationships.

**3)** When you know what your feelings are – and there may be more than one kind – accept them and calm down. Openness, acceptance and zero judgment are what are needed at this stage. You don't have to like your feelings, but if you can accept them and allow them to have some space, you can begin to feel your way through to a different and better place.

**4)** Once you reach stage four, you start to investigate what lies behind the feelings. What needs, values or expectations have been violated? Think

about what you need in order to restore the balance, what you can do and what you will need from the other. How do you want to respond? What do you want to do? Is this way of acting according to your personal values? Is this the best time or should you wait? Will the other be respectful of your feelings and wishes etc. **5)** Finally, get into action again. (Based on (Hammerich og Frydensberg 2006) and (Frederick 2009))

If you feel uncomfortable with either crying or anger, it may help you to know that the constructive potential of sadness is to feel and recognize that reality cannot be undone, and therefore one has to acknowledge it (Ten Have-De Labije and Neborsky 2012). So if your PhD student is crying, perhaps because he or she is overworked and too demanding of him or herself, it may actually be a healthy part of accepting that things have to change. It might also help you to know that the constructive potential of anger is setting limits, while still keeping the relationship. Anger, if tolerated, brings us clearness and strength. An angry PhD student with trouble tolerating the feeling will probably benefit from a time out to gather him or herself. Suggest a time out, stay calm yourself and keep in contact until you are both ready to continue. In general, it is not someone's feelings that make things worse; it is what they do to try to deny them or make them go away that's usually causing the problems. Yelling is not a way to express your anger, it is a way to get rid of it, damage your relationships and lose your inner strength and energy.







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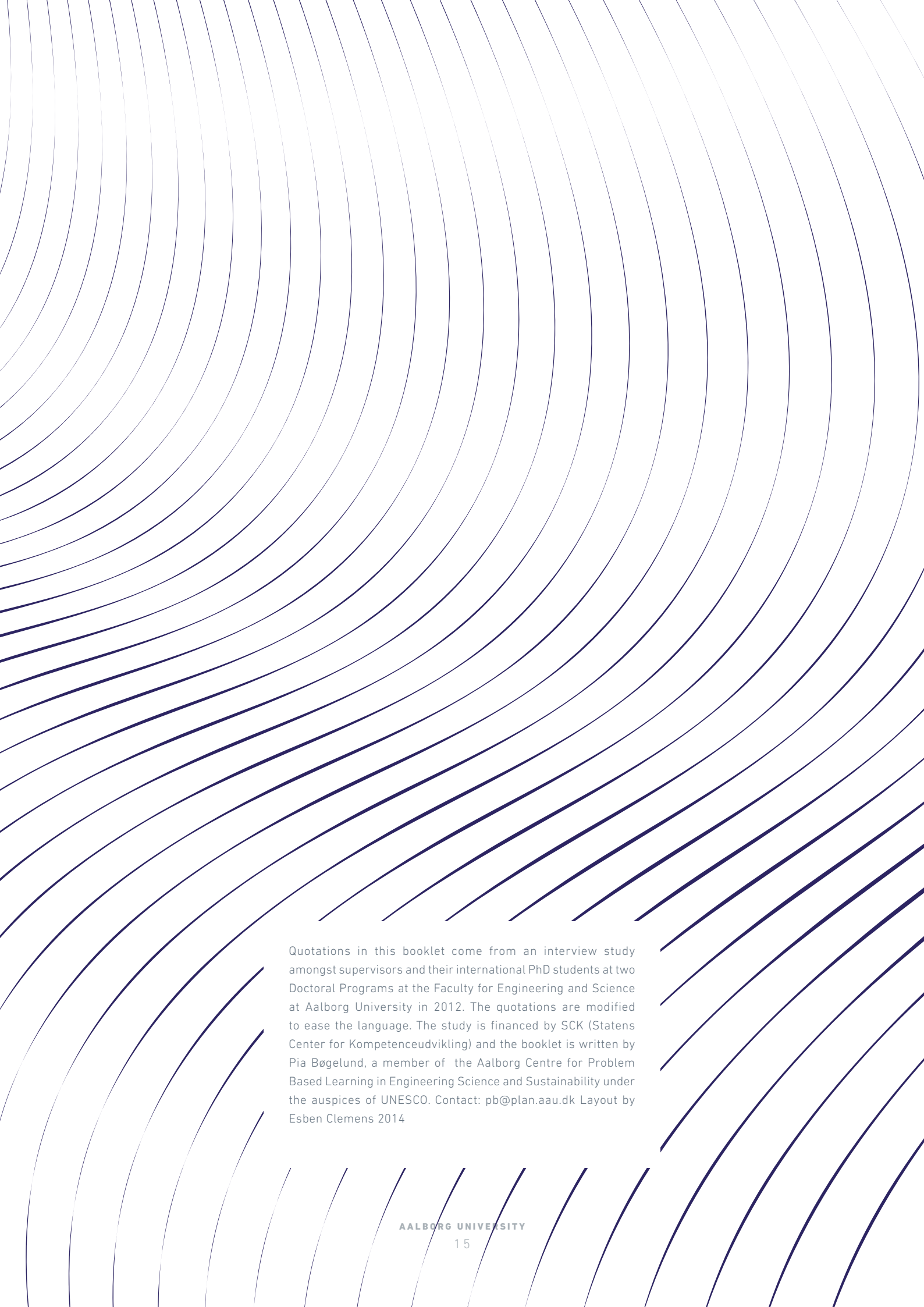
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